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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001025

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: IMO, ABIA GOVERNORS SAY YOUTH EMPLOYMENT KEY TO
NIGER DELTA CRISIS, BLAME GON FOR POOR DEMOCRACY.

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Classified By: Ambassador Robin Renee Sanders for reasons 1.4(b) and
(d)

11. (C) Summary. On May 22, 2009, the Ambassador traveled to Imo and Abia states to meet the governors, visit a school that received USG support under the Ambassador's Girls' Scholarship Program, and evaluate a potential American Corner site. Both governors spoke about the Niger Delta issue, and Imo Governor Ikedi Godson Ohakim of the Progressive People's Alliance (PPA) shared his opinion on national politics and the 2011 elections emphasizing that Nigeria is still a nascent democracy. Imo's Ohakim blamed much of the Niger Delta crisis on the Federal Government's prior alienation of the Igbo people, as well as its inability to create jobs for youth. Abia Governor Theodore Orji, also of the PPA, stressed the need to stop the kidnapping "industry", which has spilled over into his state. Both governors emphasized economic development (particularly opportunities for youth) as the key to fixing the problems of their states and ending the Niger Delta crisis, and asked for additional U.S. investment to help create jobs in the region. End Summary.

Meeting with Imo Governor

12. (C) On May 22, the Ambassador traveled to Imo State where she met with Governor Ikedi Godson Ohakim. In the private meeting (Staff Aide notetaker) the Ambassador asked the governor about his views on the 2011 elections. Ohakim stressed the need for patience to allow Nigeria's budding democracy and electoral system to develop. He underscored that two thirds of the country's independence had been under military rule, highlighting the coup in 1966 where the average age of those running the country was 23 years and 70% were bachelors. He claimed that these "adolescent rascals" indoctrinated their successors with a government that further disorganized the country. Only now, the governor said, are educated and competent leaders (in his view particularly the governors) coming into power so the country is slowly and gradually improving. However, when it comes to the Niger Delta he finds the Federal Government response a "total failure." He says throwing projects at the youth does not create jobs and that job creation is ultimately the only thing that can solve the crisis. His solution calls for oil companies, governors, and the Niger Delta ministry to come together to formulate a unified development strategy for the region focused on job creation. He then talked about the federal government's continual exclusion of the Igbo people (Imo is a predominantly Igbo state) from senior government positions, which he claims has led to a total lack of trust in the government and a lack of patriotism by all people in the Southeast region toward the Federal Government. Ambassador also asked how the

current JTF operation in the Niger Delta is affecting his state. Ohakim noted his worry with spillover of into his State as militant or militant-like elements seek other areas to flee into.

Meeting with Abia Governor

13. (C) On May 22, the Ambassador visited Abia State to meet with Governor Theodore Orji in her continued effort to get a country-wide assessment on 2011 elections. As part of the effort the Ambassador asked the governor as she has with all governors, his take on national politics and the 2011 elections. Like the Imo governor, Orji was quick to blame the Federal Government for youth unemployment. He also stressed the need for strong security to crack down on the kidnapping "industry" which he inherited from the Niger Delta and admitted reluctantly is growing, particularly in his State. Orji continually pressed the Ambassador on the need for economic development and U.S. investment in his state. He highlighted several opportunities for U.S. companies and said Nigerians want to partner with the U.S. on business and trade given the historical ties between the two countries. He recognized that many investors are concerned about security, but pointed out that other countries are coming in to invest all the time despite such security concerns. On National elections for 2011 Orji seemed uninterested as he noted his focus right now is to build on his economic vision for his State, and worry about 2011 in 2011.

School, Potential American Corner

14. (U) While in Imo State, the Ambassador visited a school supported by the USG through the Ambassador's Girl's Scholarship Program under the Africa Education Initiative. She met the seven scholarship recipients who would have otherwise been unable to attend school due

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to prohibitively high enrollment fees. The Ambassador and Mission's Information Resource Officer then visited a potential site for an American Corner in Owerri, Imo State.

SANDERS